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ABSTRACT

One problematic area in education involves the relationship between parents and teachers, between home and school. This paper briefly outlines some contemporary issues in this area, both in the public policy arena and in social scientific theory. Next, it outlines the issues as they are reflected in contemporary writing about an earlier period in the history of New York schools (1835-50). A third section of the paper summarizes findings based on an examination of primary sources. Finally, some possible implications of these findings are suggested. Appended are 44 references. (SI)

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Home-School Relations from the Perspectives of Common School Reformers of New York's Capital District, 1835-1850

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One way to attempt to clarify an issue that seems troublesome, both practically and theoretically, is to look at it in another context. Historical studies are particularly useful in this regard because they enable us to focus on both similarities and differences over time, on both continuity and change; to see where we have been and how that might relate to where we may be going. While historical studies cannot provide definitive answers to contemporary problems (see Kaestle, 1983, pp. 223-5), they can hopefully offer us some perspective, some insights.

One problematic area in education involves the relationships between parents and teachers, between home and school. This paper briefly outlines some contemporary issues in this area, both in the public policy arena and in social scientific theory. Next, it outlines the issues as they are reflected in contemporary writing about an earlier period in this history of our schools. A third section of the paper summarizes findings based on an examination of primary sources. Finally, some possible implications of these findings are suggested.

Part I - Contemporary Views of Home-School Relations

The decade of the 1980's shows signs of becoming one of the most significant periods of educational reform in American history. Several major studies of education have already been published, and the governors and legislatures of most states have already taken significant action on education issues. Nor is it likely that the wave of reform has crested and will now recede. One evidence of continuing interest in education reform is the fact that the National Governors' Association, under the leadership of its chairman, Gov. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, is currently seeking to "'set the American education agenda for the next five years.'" Alexander has identified seven "'toughest issues'" facing American education, among

them "'the concept of parental choice in schooling'". (Currence, 1985, p. 1)

The notion that parents should have the right to make decisions about which schools their children will attend has a long and controversial history. The contemporary debate over this question was touched of in 1962, when Milton Friedman wrote a book which advocated, among other things, that school finance should be reorganized on the basis of a voucher system. Friedman argued that education should be provided through a competitive free market, much as most other consumer goods and services are provided, in order to ensure the best quality services at the lowest possible price.

Various attempts to implement a system of education vouchers, most notably the effort by the Office of Economic Opportunity which resulted in the Alum Rock "public school voucher" demonstration (see Weiler, 1974; Bridge and Blackman, 1978), have thus far failed. But the idea persists in a variety of forms. Tuition tax credits have been proposed by private school groups, but have been vigorously opposed by teachers' unions and other public school groups. Meanwhile, however, many urban school districts have adopted plans relying on parental choice (magnet schools, voluntary transfers, open enrollment, etc) in their attempts to achieve racial desegregation (see McMillan, 1980).

The concept of parental choice in schooling is a specific response to the more general question, "What is the proper role of parents with respect to their children's educations?". For some, this question deals with the issue of control. Thus, for example, Coons and Sugarman (1978) choose to give their book, which advocated a voucher plan different from Friedman's, the title Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control. For them, control is to be achieved through choice. For advocates of neighborhood schools, however, control is to be achieved through maintenance of traditional

attendance area boundaries, and choice is permitted only insofar as people are able to move residentially.

School enrollment is but one aspect of the larger question of home-school relations. Other, somewhat less controversial, aspects of this relationship include parental involvement (as school volunteers, in parent-teacher organizations, through elected boards of education), communications (reports, conferences, telephone calls) and parents' activities as teachers of their own children in their homes. Whatever the specific situation, however, the basic issues seem to revolve around degrees of distance vs. interaction, of conflict vs. cooperation.

Issues regarding home-school relations have been addressed by contemporary social scientists in at least two distinct ways. One approach, found in the structural-functionalist tradition in sociology, has tended to imply separation or distance between home and school. In its most extreme form (Dreeben, 1967, 1968), structural-functionalist sociology has viewed schools and families as different structurally and by implication as having different functions with respect to preparing children for adult life. Using concepts developed by Parsons (1951, 1959), Dreeben argued that schools were particularly well suited to teaching four norms (or principles of conduct) necessary to adult life in industrial societies: independence, achievement, universalism and specificity.

While Dreeben himself did not pursue the implications of this conclusion for home-school relations, Lightfoot (1978, pp. 23-5) refers to Dreeben and Parsons as a starting point to a discussion of spheres of control and territoriality as these effect home-school relations. But despite the amount of attention which Lightfoot devoted to conflict and distancing, she concluded (1978, p. 171) that "Children seem to learn and grow in schools where parents

and teachers share similar visions and collaborate on guiding children forward."

In contrast to the structural-functionalist approach, child development theorists have developed an ecological model (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979, chap. 9) which emphasizes mutually supportive linkages between child-rearing settings (especially home and school) which operate within the context of a common culture. Cooperation between responsible adults in various settings (including parents and teachers) is assumed to be both possible and beneficial for the children involved. Based on this conclusion, an experimental program aimed at improving home-school communications through parental empowerment has been developed and field tested by Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (see Cochran and Henderson, 1985).

Other researchers (Leichter, 1974, 1979; Litwak and Meyer, 1966, 1974; Waller, 1932) have argued a variety of positions with respect to home-school relations. No clear concensus among researchers can be said to exist.

Part II - Contemporary Views of Home-School Relations in the Common School Reform Era (1835-1850)

This paper seeks to explore the issues related to home-school relations by examining the perspectives of educational reformers in an earlier reform era, the 1830's and 40's. This is the era of "common school reform", when public schools were beginning to take on many of their present characteristics. The origins of public education can of course be traced back farther than the mid-nineteenth century, but graded classes, post-secondary teacher training, uniform textbooks, a predominantly female teaching staff, longer school years, regular attendance, expanded curricula, elimination of sectarian religious influence and state systems of supervision all emerged during this period. Perhaps most importantly, our modern distinction between "public education"

(managed by elected or appointed officials and paid for entirely by tax revenues) and "private education" (privately managed and financed) became increasingly clear at this time.

Contemporary writers on the common school reform era are united in seeing different solutions being proposed at that time to the question of how the schools should be organized. But they are divided over how the reformers viewed parents and the implications of those views for home-school relations. This paper focuses on two recent interpretations of the common school reform era, one by Carl Kaestle (1983), the other by David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot (1982).

Carl Kaestle, in Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860 (1983), devoted considerable attention to urban schooling, but he clearly intended that his account would apply to cities of all sizes and even to rural areas, and to the northeast and midwest (as far as the Mississippi) in general (he treats the southern states separately, those west of the Mississippi not at all). Given this geographic scope, he described the antebellum period (1830-1860) in terms of a conflict between people committed to one or the other of two variants of "native Protestant ideology": "cosmopolitan" and "localist". The cosmopolitan variant "advocated government action to improve the economy, shape the morals and unify the culture of mid-nineteenth century America" (p. 77), and was primarily identified with the Whig Party. Localists, on the other hand, "resisted government intervention in institutional and personal life" (p. 77) and tended to be identified with the Democratic Party. Common school reformers accepted and acted upon the cosmopolitan variant of native Protestant ideology, while their opponents included native Protestant localists, as well as immigrant (mainly Irish) Catholics.

Kaestle identified three broad goals of the reformers: (1) assimilation (bringing as many children of school age as possible -- especially immigrant children -- into the common schools, on a regular basis and for longer school years); (2) centralization (creation of state education agencies and a system of county superintendents, and centralization of district schools into town-wide school systems) and (3) standardization (uniform textbooks, better facilities, graded classrooms and improved teacher training).

With regard to home-school relations, Kaestle reports that common school reformers engaged in an "anti-parental campaign", in response to what they regarded as "'undue interference of parents'" (p. 159) which undermined the authority of teachers. Localists and Catholics, on the other hand, tended to uphold the notion of parental rights and responsibilities with respect to schooling. "The adjustment between the family and the antebellum school occasioned sporadic conflict between self-consciously 'modern' school spokesmen and stubbornly traditional parents." (p. 160) The issue, however, was eventually resolved in favor of the schools' authority. "In general, parents in nineteenth century America wanted schools to take custody of their children, and they wanted schools to train their children in basic schools and attitudes. The eventual price that they paid was the loss of authority and control over their children's education." (p. 160) Kaestle notes some major exceptions, including religious minorities (Irish Catholics and German pietists) who opted out of the public schools rather than have their religious beliefs demeaned or ignored, but otherwise he reports that common school reformers had achieved most of their goals by 1860, despite considerable resistance by some parents.

Another, very different, interpretation of the common school reform era was offered by David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot in their book, Managers of

Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980. In part, this difference is due to a conscious decision by Tyack and Hansot to "concentrate on what we take to be the mainstream: rural, unbureaucratic, locally created schools, controlled by lay people and permeated with a Protestant-republican ideology." (p. 18) Mid-nineteenth century America, they pointed out, "was four-fifths rural [and] had a miniscule government". The other significant decision which shaped this book was the decision to describe the common school reform movement as a movement; that is, to describe what the reformers actually did and how they thought about what they did, particularly in relation to other social movements of their day.

Like Kaestle, Tyack and Hansot noted the existence of conflict in relation to the organization of common schooling, especially the conflict between "pietistic" Protestants and Catholics. But unlike Kaestle, they stressed the degree to which reformers sought concensus through persuasion, relying on their skills as orators and writers, and emphasizing millenial themes of the mid-nineteenth century religious awakening of pietistic churches. They noted the existence of different models of school organization, as outlined by Michael Katz (1971, 1973). But they argued that "'democratic localism'... was more prevalent in most parts of the nation than was 'incipient bureaucracy', except in the larger cities" (p. 60). Among the illustrations of this conclusion are the facts that "as late as 1890, the median size of state departments of education was two, including the superintendent" (p. 18) and "as late as 1889, most state superintendents of public instruction said that compulsory schooling laws... were dead letters unless local public opinion supported them" (p. 60).

As far as parents were concerned, Tyack and Hansot discussed various conflicts, especially across religious and ethnic lines, but they made no mention of anything resembling the degree of hostility between parents and

school reformers described by Kaestle. Rather, they cite Robert Wiebe's (1969) observation that "the educational 'reformers believed that they spoke for the nation rather than to it. They assumed that community leaders everywhere shared the same ethical system, the same dedication to public service and the same aspirations to unity.' For that reason, they endeavored 'not to convince people but simply to rouse them, and like-minded legions across the land, community by community, would translate their dream into practice.'" (p. 44)

Of course, this did not always happen. Not all parents, for example, heard or heeded the call to send their children to the common schools. In recognition of this fact, common school reformers in Massachusetts succeeded in gaining the passage of the nation's first compulsory education law in 1852. But, with specific reference to this law, Tyack and Hansot wrote that "Much of the state legislation of moral interventionism and social reform was merely hortatory in effect. It attempted to put sanctions of majority rule behind those who sought to preserve a social concensus on right action in local communities." (p. 61) In other words, despite being highly critical of some parents, common school reformers still relied on parents and others in local communities to accomplish the goals they set. Bureaucratic solutions to such problems, according to Tyack and Hansot, were not to be developed until after the Civil War.

In summary, these contemporary writers gave two very different accounts of reformers' perceptions of home-school relations in the common school reform era. Kaestle's account tends to emphasize the themes of conflict and distancing implicit in the writings of Dreeben and made explicit by Lightfoot. On the other hand, Tyack and Hansot's version of events during the same period suggests a high degree of interaction between home and school and the expectation (if not always the reality) of parental cooperation in achieving

the goals set by the reformers, more in line with the ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner.

Part III - Common School Reformers' Views of Home-School Relations

In light of the differing views of home-school relations put forth by contemporary social scientists and historians, this paper explores the views expressed in books, reports and published speaches of four common school reformers who were active in the four county area including Albany, NY in the years 1835-1850.

Section A - The Setting

Insofar as the major distinction to be drawn in writing the history of the common school reform era is between urban and rural areas, the Albany area provides an interesting test of the accounts of common school reform summarized above. This area occupied an intermediate position between the major east coast cities (Boston, New York City, Philadelphia) and the predominantly rural hinterland. Until shortly after 1850, when it was surpassed by Buffalo, Albany was New York State's second largest city, with a population of 24,209 in 1830 and 50,763 in 1850. The area includes two other cities of note, Troy (11,556 in 1830, increasing to 28,785 in 1850) and Schenectady (4,268 in 1830, up to 8,921 in 1850). The population of this four county area was 74% rural in 1830, but this dropped to 55% rural by 1850. By way of contrast, the population of the state as a whole (including New York City) was 85% rural in 1830 and still 72% rural in 1850 (Andriot, 1980).

To the extent that Kaestle adopted a more urban orientation (in contrast to Tyack and Hansot's primary focus on rural America) what he wrote should certainly apply to the Albany area. Kaestle argued as much, citing Schenectady as an example of a small, inland city with an urban pattern of schooling. He

pointed out that Schenectady had independent pay schools and a preparatory grammar school run by Union College. In addition, "Philanthropic citizens tried to meet the schooling needs of the less affluent by creating a Lancaster School Society and a Sunday School Society in 1816.... These schools thrived until the 1850's, when Schenectady officials somewhat reluctantly converted them into free public schools." Kaestle concluded that Schenectady's "educational development was very much like that of New York or Philadelphia" (p. 56).

However, to the extent that the major consideration was not urban vs. rural but rather divisions along ethnic and religious lines, the most important census data to look at would be those relating to the relative sizes of the native Protestant majority vs. the immigrant Catholic minority. U.S. Census reports for 1830 through 1850 do not provide any clear-cut answer to this question, but some inferences can be drawn.

First, the total population of the four-county area increased about 50% between 1830 and 1850 (from 153,988 to 232,342), while the three largest cities doubled in size. While much of this increase can no doubt be attributed to immigration from Europe, much of it was probably due to internal migration, primarily from near-by New England.

Secondly, the 1850 census report includes (for the first time) statistics on school attenders and adult illiterates by place of birth (native vs. foreign). There were 3,094 children of foreign birth attending schools in the Albany area in 1850 (about six percent of the total number attending school), and school attenders were about 90% of the population between the ages of 5 and 14. There were also 5,128 adult illiterates of foreign birth (73% of all adult illiterates), and these people made up about 4% of the total adult population. Obviously, both these figures underestimate, by some unknown amount, the total

number of foreign born individuals in the two age groups, as there were certainly some foreign born children not in school and some foreign born adults who were literate (as well as some individuals in each category who were missed by the census takers). On the other hand, some of the foreign born were probably Protestants, and hence easier to assimilate into the Protestant-dominated culture.

Finally, the 1850 census included data on numbers of churches of various denominations. Of the 294 churches recorded in the census report, Methodist churches led the list with 83, followed by Baptist and Dutch Reformed (49 each), Presbyterian (38), and Episcopal (17). There were only 13 Roman Catholic churches, just ahead of the 11 Friends meeting houses. However, this almost certainly underestimates the proportion of Catholics in the population.

On a county by county basis, Albany ranks highest in all these indicators of immigrant Catholics, followed by Rensselaer (including Troy). Saratoga, the most rural county, is third on each of the indicators, while Schenectady, the smallest county in total population, is last.

In conclusion, one may infer from the available census data that the population of the Albany area was predominantly Protestant, even as it became increasingly urban. It is impossible to set any precise figure on the size of the Catholic minority, but even if that were possible, it would be difficult to determine at what point the size of the Catholic population would begin to influence the thinking of the common school reformers.

Section B - The Reformers

The four common school reformers whose written works are examined later in this paper (J. Orville Taylor, Alonzo Potter, Samuel Young and Samuel S. Randall) generally conform to the profile of common school reformers given

by Kaestle and by Tyack and Hansot. All four were native born, three of them in New York State and one (Young) in near-by western Massachusetts. All four were apparently Protestants, although Potter (and possibly also Randall) was an Episcopalian, and hence not a member of any of the pietistic denominations, as these are defined by Tyack and Hansot (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational). Three of them came from relatively prosperous families, attending private academies (then the primary form of secondary education) and colleges; the fourth (Young) was the son of a farmer and "essentially a self-made man. Two (Young and Randall) trained for the law, while the other two trained for the ministry. (see Fitch, 1916; Johnson, 1935; Ohles, 1978)

Like the reformers studied by Tyack and Hansot (1982, p. 45), these four reformers "had very fluid careers, moving from one occupation to another. Very few picked education as a life-long calling." Taylor, for example, worked at various times as a schoolteacher, lecturer, editor, college professor, farmer and businessman. Potter was a professor at Union College in Schenectady for about twenty years, a tenure interrupted by five years as rector of St. Paul's in Boston. He spent the last twenty years of his life as Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania. Young held a variety of elected and appointed offices in New York State government, including Member of the Assembly, State Senator, Canal Commissioner, County Judge and Secretary of State. He was an unsuccessful candidate for Governor and for U.S. Senator. Only Randall, after seven years in the practice of law, made a career in education. He spent twelve years in the State Department of Public Instruction, during most of that time holding the title of Deputy Superintendent. After losing a bid to become Superintendent, he moved to New York City, where he spent the next sixteen years as City Superintendent of Public Schools.

All four of those included in this paper made significant contributions

to the cause of common school reform during the period 1835-1850. J. Orville Taylor, a native of the Town of Charlton in Saratoga County, "engaged in a career promoting educational reforms, lecturing in the major cities of the country (1836-51)" (Ohles, p. 1275). In 1837, he was involved in getting the New York State legislature to pass legislation providing for school libraries. He also "edited and published the 'Common School Assistant' in 1836, having a monthly circulation of 56,000 -- after four years it was adopted and published by the State of New York" (The Geneology of Judge John Taylor..., 1886). He has also been credited with helping to organize the New York State Teachers' Association (Cavert, 1970). Taylor was the author of The District School (1834), The Farmer's School Book (1837) and The First Lecture on Popular Education (reprinted in the Ballston Democrat in 1848, original date unknown). He also translated Victor Cousin's Report on the Prussian School System (1836).

Alonzo Potter's involvement in the common school reform movement spans a period of six years (1839-45), during which time he was also Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union College in Schenectady. In 1839, he was appointed chairman of the Board of Visitors of Schools, and traveled extensively around the state in that capacity. The following year, he "visited and personally inspected... several of the teachers' departments connected with the academies, submitting a very able report" which included the recommendation that a normal school be established at Albany to supplement the existing teacher training programs (Randall, 1844, p. 75). He repeated this recommendation at a state convention of County Superintendents of Education, held in Utica in May, 1842, and a resolution was passed supporting the idea (Randall, 1871, pp. 150-9). This proposal was passed by the state legislature on May 7, 1844, at which time Potter was appointed to the executive committee of the new

institution. Later that year, acting of behalf of the executive committee, Potter hired David Perkins Page to be the first principal (New York State College for Teachers, 1884). Potter was the author of Part I of The School and The Schoolmaster (1843), Part II of which was written by George Emerson of Boston. According to a preface written by Horace Mann, this book was to be distributed to every school district in the states of New York and Massachusetts. An historian of Oswego Normal School noted that as of the founding of that institution in 1861, "The two best books [for teacher education], Potter and Emerson's The School and the Schoolmaster and Page's Theory and Practice encompassed all that was then known of professional areas within a few hundred pages" (Rogers, 1961, p. 4).

Samuel Young became involved in educational reform near the conclusion of a long political career most notable for his opposition to "the Whig policy of internal improvement through deficit financing" (Lecount, 1971, p. 212). Young had a strong interest in education, as indicated by lectures on the subject delivered in 1837 and 1841, but prior to his election as Secretary of State and ex officio Superintendent of Common Schools for a three-year term (1842-45), he apparently regarded education as a matter best left up to individuals and localities. Once in office, however, he became an active supporter of state intervention on behalf of common schools, introducing legislation in 1843 to create a normal school at Albany, to strengthen the offices of county superintendent and district trustee, creating a new office of town superintendent and perpetuating the district library system (Randall, 1844, pp. 76-77). When legislation was approved creating a normal school at Albany, Young became chairman of the executive committee (ex officio), and, after leaving office, was reappointed to the executive committee when Potter resigned (New York State College for Teachers, 1884, pp iv, vii).

Samuel Randall, the only career educator in the group of common school reformers under study, provided continuity and memory for the State Department of Public Instruction. Superintendents served for three year terms, and were rarely re-elected, whereas Randall served as Deputy Superintendent for most of his twelve years of service between 1837 and 1852. In 1844, his Digest of the Common School System of the State of New York was published and distributed to local school officials. This volume provided detailed descriptions of the legal powers of each class of school officials, along with a 77-page history of the development of the common schools of the state up to that time. This hsitorical section was expended on and extended in two of his later books, The Common School System of the State of New York (1851) and History of the Common School System of the State of New York (1871). In 1851, Randall was appointed by the legislature to recommend a revised code for the schools of the state. His report to the legislature, submitted the following year, made several major recommendations (separating the positions of Secretary of State and State Superintendent of Common Schools, restoring the position of County Superintendents (which had been abolished in 1847) and creating a permanent property tax for the support of schools) which were subsequently adopted into law. Randall was also the author of Mental and Moral Culture and Popular Education (1844) and First Principles of Popular Education and Public Instruction (1868). He was a frequent contributer to the District School Journal, and in 1845 was appointed its editor.

These four men are certainly not the only ones active in the common school reform movement in the Albany area, but they all made important contributions to school reform, and they all left written records of their views on a variety of subjects, including home-school relations.

Section C - Reformers Views of Home-School Relations

These common school reformers spoke and wrote extensively on the responsibilities of parents with respect to their children's educations. Among the topics they addressed were the following:

(1) Parents as educators - "To you is committed the protection and education of those whom God has given you," J. Orville Taylor (1834, p. 26) instructed parents, "and you will be accountable for the faithfulness or unfaithfulness in which you perform this duty." Taylor's concept of education included first and foremost moral development. "To educate your children," he continued, "in the full sense of the term, is to form their characters, [all underlined portions of quotations appeared in italics in the original texts] -- to give them a character which will last, not only through time, but through eternity."

Sending their children to school did not relieve parents of direct responsibility in this regard, Taylor argued (1834, pp. 28-29). "Even if the privilege of a school be enjoyed, the education of the children belongs, in great degree to the parents. By the parents it must be commenced, carried forward and completed." Consistent with this view of parental responsibility, he argued (1834, p. 112) that "Teachers are under a high responsibility, since to them parents have committed the education of their children. They have voluntarily undertaken to assist parents in one of their most important duties, and the parent has confided a trust in them of the highest nature." Thus, in Taylor's view, the relationship between parents and teachers is one in which the parents have delegated a part of their responsibility to the teachers, who will assist them in carrying it out.

Potter, Young and Randall were all in agreement with Taylor in identifying the formation of character as a key component of education and assigning a

major responsibility for education, thus conceived, to parents. Thus, for example, Randall wrote in 1844 (1855, pp. 88-9 [all quotes are from the second edition, but internal evidence regarding school finances, the formation of normal schools and total enrollment in the state indicates that no changes were made before reprinting]) that "The ideals of excellence and the motives for exertion are first conceived from the lessons and the examples of the home.... The teacher succeeds to the authority and influence of the parent... It is at this period that moral impressions are made with the greatest facility, and take deepest root."

Young (1841, p. 29), in accord with ideas prevalent at the time with regard to the differing roles of men and women, specified that the parent to whom the responsibility for educating the children primarily falls is the mother. "And who is the natural instructor of infancy, childhood and youth? Evidently the mother. No other human being feels half the abiding solicitude for the well-being of the child." Potter (1843, p. 52) elaborated on this view when he stated that "Her appropriate empire is over the family, where she not only lays the foundation of society by laying the foundation, during childhood, of individual character, but where she exerts... through her husband and children a humanizing influence over the world." Both Young and Potter suggested that this maternal influence did not end when children first entered school, but was a continuing influence throughout "infancy, childhood and youth".

(2) Parents as School Decision Makers - Samuel Randall began the preface of his Digest of the Common School System (1844, p. iii) by commenting that "In submitting the following work to the inhabitants and officers of school districts, the various town and county officers... and the public generally, the compiler has been actuated by an ernest desire to diffuse as widely as

possible, a more thorough and accurate knowledge of the history and details of that system than has hitherto appeared."

The reason for this desire is clear. the entire operation of the common schools of New York State in the 1840's was to a great degree dependent on local voluntary activity. Not only was there no compulsory attendance law to require the presence of students, there was no one except the local community to require the support (financial and otherwise) of parents and other citizens. The State Superintendent of Common Schools could provide encouragement, some financial aid (on a voluntary matching basis) and a formal system of county supervision, but much depended on local people to perform the necessary responsibilities. Thus, Randall (1844, p. 138) enumerated the "Powers and Duties of Inhabitants when Assembled in District Meeting" as including:

> "to choose district officers at their first meeting upon the organization of the district, and as often as vacancies occur, by expiration of the term of office or otherwise; to designate a site for a district school-house; to lay such tax on the taxable inhabitants of the district as the meeting shall deem sufficient to purchase or lease a suitable site for a school-house, and to build, hire or purchase such school-house, and to keep in repair and furnish the same with necessary fuel and appendages..."

These duties, it should be noted, were not assigned to elected or appointed officials, but to all the inhabitants of the district assembled in district meetings. Furthermore, it is clear from various examples given by Potter and others that the inhabitants who performed these duties were primarily parents whose children attended the school in question. This point is further emphasized in arguments presented to the more affluent parents regarding choice of school (see below).

The importance of parents as decision makers with respect to the common

schools attended by their children is further underlined by Potter. He and his co-author, George Emerson, describe their book (1843, title page) as "A Manual for the Use of Teachers, Employers, Trustees, Inspectors, &c, &c., of Common Schools". The key to this description is the term "employers". In a late twentieth century context, one might be tempted to envision a school administrator, or in a formal sense the members of the board of education, as the "employer". But in the 1840's, no local school administrators existed, and the elected officials were known as trustees. "Employer" seems to have some other meaning. The best explanation for the term appears to be suggested by Potter's comment (1843, p. 194) that "The teacher is required, by law, to keep an exact record of the number of days and half days that each child attends... so that the teacher may know how much shall be deducted from each employer's rate-bill on account of absences." Under the system of school finance then in use, there were three main sources of funds for schools: the state's School Fund, local taxes and rate bills. Prior to 1840, rate bills accounted for over 50% of total school revenues (see Randall, 1844, p. 83). And these rate bills, equivalent to the tuition paid for private schools or tutors, were paid by parents. Hence, it appears that when Potter and Emerson used the word "employers" they actually meant parents. But the fact that parents paid teachers directly for their services would suggest that they had greater authority over teachers than would otherwise be the case. This tends to re-enforce the point made above with regard to Taylor's comments on parents as educators that parents delegated this responsibility to teachers.

(3) Parents and School Attendance - Common school reformers in the 1840's were opposed to the rate bill system because of its negative impact on school attendance. Potter (1843, p. 194) explained it thus: "... a premium is, by law, actually offered to the parent to induce him to detain his children from

school, or to gratify them when they wish to stay away.... It is difficult to conceive of a more preposterous law." Of course, the rate bills were not the only reasons cited by common school reformers for the failure of parents to send their children to schools. Potter (1843, pp. 186-9) described these non-attenders as follows:

> "This class includes children of both foreigners and natives. The former, usually arrive in this country, poor. Many of them are unable to speak our language; some of them do not appreciate the necessity and importance of education; others lead a vagrant life, as laborers on canals and railroads, or as hired workmen.... Too often... the poor foreigner... remains ignorant of this benevolent provision of the state on his behalf; and when, in other cases, he would avail himself of it, obstructions are sometimes placed in his way....
>
> "The children of many native... citizens, are also to be found among those, who never attend school. In many instances, this results from the prolifigate habits of the parents...; in other cases, it should be charged to an ignorance which cannot comprehend the advantages of education; and in others, again, to extreme indigence...."

The exact number of non-attenders is difficult to determine. Randall (1844, p. 73) cites a figure of 30,000 for the state as a whole, while Potter (1843, p. 190) cites the same figure as applying to New York City only. But whatever the figure for non-attenders, common school reformers perceived an even greater problem with respect to irregular attendance for relatively brief periods during the year. Young (1845, p. 12) reported that "An aggregate of 709,156 children... have been under instruction in the common schools of the State for a greater or less period during the year reported... Of this number... 65,000 [have attended for] eight months or upwards... and 474,000 for two months and upwards; leaving only about 235,000 as the number who have attended for a less period than two months." As Potter

(1843, p. 169) remarked, "It is quite evident that children cannot improve at school, who are one day present and the next day absent, and who, besides this irregularity in their ordinary attendance, are kept entirely from school during several months each year."

The solution to problems of non-attendance or low attendance lay in part in the elimination of rate bills (accomplished in 1857) and in part in the influence of informed and aroused public opinion. Taylor (1848, p. 1) expressed it thus:

> "I say the state has a right to compel parents to educate their children or let them be educated. This compulsion, however, cannot be felt in statute law, but in an enlightened public sentiment, -- so pervading, so resting upon every man, that he who will let his children remain in ignorance, will be looked upon, and pointed out to passers-by, as a felon. With us, public opinion is omnipotent; more despotic and compulsory than the most absolute throne in Europe."

In this connection, as in numerous other contexts, common school reformers appealed repeatedly to the influence of "enlightened public sentiment".

(4) Parents' Choices of Schools - While common school reformers labored to persuade those parents who were poor and uneducated to send their children to the common schools, they were equally determined that "our wealthy, intelligent and prominent citizens" should do likewise. "These," Taylor (1848, p. 1) stated, "except for a few, more noble minded and patriotic, send their children to private schools, and academies and seminaries. The Common School is left in the hands of the uneducated, or with those whose business is so pressing that no time can be given to its improvement." Implicit in this argument is the assumption, referred to above, that while by law it is the "inhabitants... of school districts" who are responsible for maintaining the district schools, in fact it is largely the parents

whose children attend those schools who assume such responsibilities. Taylor argued that wealthy parents had a personal stake in supporting the common schools (1848, p. 1):

> "... in the majority of places that I have visited, the citizen of wealth and influence has said to me, 'I can't send my children to the public school to sit on the bench by the unwashed.' I say, then, you had better go and wash the children -- while they are young and easily handled; for they will grow up and soil your children much more hereafter. For these unwashed (and your children will have to partake with them) will obscene, vulgar speeches be made... and for them will dishonest, ignorant rulers be elected.... Look at that child in the gutter... he is... one of our sovereigns...! Should he not have a sovereign's education?.... Men of wealth, men of learning, poor instruction upon the heads of the people, you owe them that baptism."

Potter addressed similar arguments to the rich and learned, and presented a detailed set of reasons why patronage of the common school by such parents was in their enlightened self-interest, and preferable to any available alternative, including instruction by the parent, instruction by a private tutor or attendance at a "select" (private) school.

(5) Parents' Relationships with Teachers - Given the extensive involvement of parents in the district schools of the mid-nineteenth century, one may ask to what extent this relationship was characterized by cooperation or by conflict, and if the latter how common school reformers advised resolving specific conflicts when they arose.

The existence of conflicts can be simply illustrated with regard to the selection and purchase of textbooks. The problem arose because parents were responsible for purchasing their children's textbooks, usually on the recommendation of teachers, and teachers changed frequently. As a result,

several different books for a single subject could typically be found in use in any one-room school, creating havoc in the teacher's attempts to instruct. As Potter noted (1843, p. 230), this system was a source of conflict between parents and teachers: "'Parents will not get them', say the teachers. 'Every teacher must have new books', say the parents." The problem was so severe in Saratoga County in 1844 that the County Superintendent of Common Schools, Seabury Allen, devoted a major part of his annual report to Superintendent Young to "the great evil of this diversity of books" and to an appeal for textbook uniformity.

There were other problems as well, including disputes over discipline and curriculum, but by far the most serious issue seems to have involved religious instruction. For example, Randall (1871, p. 307) described the following incident, which was brought to his attention in 1853:

> "... the Rev. Dr. Quigley, a Roman Catholic clergyman of Schagticoke in Rensselaer County... [set] forth that, in many of the Common Schools of that and the adjoining county of Washington, the religion and faith of Catholic children were interferred with, by being compelled to join in prayers, and to read and commit to memory portions of a version of the Bible of which the Catholic Church disapproved; and stating that on a certain day in August preceding, a Miss Gifford, a teacher in Washington County, ordered one of her pupils, twelve years of age, to study and read the Protestant testament, and on his declining to do so, on the plea of his unwillingness to disobey the orders of his parents, and to violate the precepts of his religion, chastized him severely, and expelled him ignominiously from the school."

What is particularly significant about this incident is the way in which it was resolved. Randall, in his official response to the complaint, after citing past Superintendents Dix and Spencer, ruled that "the teacher may open his school by prayer 'provided he does not encroach on the hours

allotted to instruction, and provided the attendance of the scholars is not exacted as a matter of school discipline.'" Given the strong and repeated emphasis which common school reformers placed on the importance of education for character and the importance of (Protestant) religious instruction for that purpose, this ruling represented a major (though perhaps not sufficient) concession to the wishes of Catholic parents. Consider, for example, the following resolution, which Potter submitted to the state convention of County Superintendents of Schools, held in Syracuse in 1845 (Randall, 1871, p. 200):

> "Resolved, that this Convention regard the introduction of the BIBLE into the schools as an object earnestly to be desired; but that the time and manner in which this object is to be accomplished is a question which ought to be decided by the inhabitants of the districts; and that in all measures for the promotion of moral and religious culture in our schools, sacred regard ought to be had for the rights and tenderness manifested toward the scruples and prejudices of all."

This resolution was vigorously debated by the Convention, but not for the reasons that would be the case in the late twentieth century. No one raised any issues, constitutional or otherwise, about whether it was appropriate to introduce the Bible into the schools. Rather the debate was over whether the inhabitants of the districts (parents) should have any say in the matter. Two speakers from New York City, where a local law required the use of the Bible in public schools, were particularly outspoken in their attack on Potter's resolution. Randall (1871, p. 205) noted Potter's reply:

> "... he advocated the introduction of the Bible into all the schools, as soon as practicable, by persuasion, but not by compulsion; that the Superintendent and others should recommend its introduction, but not exact it.... Was not this better and wiser than coercive legislation -- more in harmony with the

> genius of our institutions and the spirit of the Common School system?.... The whole theory of the system involved the idea that the people were to administer it -- the State, through its officers, acting the part of patron and supervisor. For a country like ours, was not this better than the centralized absolutism of Prussia or Austria....?"

This notion of local control (though that phrase does not appear in any of the books, reports and speaches studied) does not mean that common school reformers believed that parents were free to do whatever they wished with respect to their children's schools. Taylor (1834, p. 29) advised parents, "Do not speak unfavorably of the teacher before your children, but teach them to love the instructor and the school-room, and at all times be obedient." And Potter (1843, p. 160) argued that "If he [the parent] shows, by his deportment, that he values the school, and is anxious to increase its efficiency and usefulness; if, instead of obstructing the teacher in his plans or disputing his authority, he assiduously furthers both... in such case both teacher and taught will have the strongest inducements to exertion, and the school will prove most fruitful of good."

But such comments should not be interpreted as unquestioning support for all teachers at all times, whatever they may do. Taylor and Potter, in particular, were concerned about the inadequate training and poor qualifications of some teachers. Taylor (1834, p. 110) warned "let parents take heed to their children's tutors", and added (p. 114) "the teacher, in taking care of these children, becomes deeply accountable to the parent." Potter echoed these remarks, and added, quoting from the report of the Board of Visitors (of which he was chairman), "The lamentable condition of our schools... may be, in great measure, imputed to the fact that they have not been heretofore visited by the inspectors.... [or] by trustees or parents, for the purpose of examining their condition or encouraging their progress." Randall (1855, pp. 152-3)

echoed these concerns, adding "The strongest incentive which can be held out to a deserving teacher -- the hope of securing the approbation of those for whom he labors, by the fidelity and ability with which his duties are performed -- is entirely wanting...." Such comments imply a great deal of faith in the potential, if not actual, ability of parents to adequately supervise teachers and promote the improvement of schools.

(6) Parents as Agents of Reform - As the preceding remarks indicate, common school reformers relied heavily on parents for assistance in carrying out their reform program. This is indicated in several ways. For one thing, several of the books which have been examined were expressly addressed to parents (among others), most notably Taylor (1834) and Potter (1843). There are also numerous statements by reformers indicating their confidence in the possibility of persuading parents to participate in the reform effort. Take, for example, the following (Randall, 1855, p. 8):

> "... convince the most careless and indifferent individual that the present and future happiness of his children is placed in a great measure at his own disposal; that... it is in his power to give such a direction to their docile minds as will... insure their welfare in all coming time... -- let him be well and thoroughly convinced of all this, and he becomes a most efficient and intelligent promoter of every institution for popular education."

To be sure, parents did not always appear to be living up to the reformers' expectations, did not always appear ready to participate in what Potter (1843, p. 14) called "the great work of school regeneration which is now in progress". But such lack of response merely inspired them to redouble their efforts, to marshall additional arguments on behalf of the goals they sought.

Such efforts did not continue indefinitely, however. Taylor made his greatest effort on behalf of common school reform between 1834 and 1840.

Potter withdrew from active involvement in the work of reform after six years (1839-45), when he became Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania. Young, the oldest of the four, died in 1850. Only Randall remained active in the work of the common schools beyond 1850.

Randall's views on the issues discussed above underwent substantial modification during the 1850's and 1860's. Of the four reformers whose works are examined in this paper, Randall was the least committed to an active role for parents in education. In the books he wrote during the 1840's, he had less to say about parents, and appears to be less intent on parents as an audience, than the others. When he did speak about parents, he said much the same things, but there are significant issues, such as the causes for non-attendance and the methods for resolving parent-teacher conflict, which he simply did not address. His silences on some issues are hard to interprete, but it is at least possible that he disagreed in some respects with the optimistic views that his fellow reformers held regarding parents.

In any case, his views regarding parents changed dramatically by 1868, the year in which he wrote First Principles of Popular Education and Public Instruction. This could be accounted for in part by the fact that he served for sixteen years (1854-70) as Superintendent of Schools for the City of New York. But it could also reflect a more general shift in opinion among educational leaders in their assessment of the possible contributions of parents to school improvement.

Whatever the cause, the contrast between Randall's views in 1868 and those described above (two decades earlier) is clear-cut. "How vast, how solemn and how responsible is the work of education," he wrote (1868, p. 18), "how full of embarassments, of difficulties and of obstacles... and how liable to neglect and injudicious culture." Parents could not be relied on

to support education, he noted (p. 19), in part due to "hereditary tendencies" which dictated that "mental and moral, no less than physical characteristics, are not infrequently transmitted... from one generation to another." And he pointed an accusing finger (pp. 20-1) at "those parents... who from ignorance, intention or recklessness... neglect to watch over the gradual development of those young minds committed to their charge or... daily contaminate... the moral nature of their children." In contrast to this perceived failure of parents, Randall argued (p. 32) that "The current testimony of the ablest and most experienced educators of our own and other lands affords the most conclusive assurances that under a well-adminsitered and efficient system of universal education, ninety-nine out of every one hundred, even of the generation first submitted to the experiment, may be rendered... good members of society..." In summary, Randall had, by 1868, concluded that the state had a strong and compelling interest in the education of each child, free from any involvement by the child's parents, for the benefit of society as a whole. It was a conclusion which common school reformers, probably even Randall himself, would have found inconceivable twenty years earlier.

Part IV - Implications

In conclusion, this paper will address the differing views outlined in the introductory sections among contemporary historians of education, contemporary social scientists and contemporary policy makers.

First, with regard to the accounts of the common school reform era given by Kaestle and by Tyack and Hansot, the evidence reviewed in this paper supports the latter account more than it does the former. This must be taken as a very tentative conclusion because of the limitations of the study (four reformers, from one small geographical area, three of whom had ceased to be active in common school reform by 1850). The fact that Randall's

later writing includes views similar to those described by Kaestle is not insignificant, but it must be noted that Randall wrote First Principles in 1868, after fourteen years in New York City, whereas Kaestle sought to describe such places as Schenectady during the period 1830-1860.

Secondly, with regard to the issues of distancing vs. interaction and conflict vs. cooperation identified in the review of the contemporary social science literature, this historical study can at best hope to offer a few insights. Clearly, the common school reformers assumed a great deal of interaction between parents and teachers and believed that this was beneficial for children despite the instances of conflict which arose. One might argue, along the lines suggested by Dreeben, that this assumption was naive and that subsequent events (including Randall's apparent change of views) have proved them wrong. Dreeben clearly stated that his analysis applied to modern industrial societies and the values required to function in such societies, whereas America in the common school reform era was still predominantly rural and agricultural. Advocates of the ecological model, however, could argue that what matters is not whether a society happens to be industrial or agricultural, but whether parents and teachers share the same set of cultural values. If they do, the chances for cooperation are enhanced. If they do not, as in the case of Catholics in the predominantly Protestant culture of mid-nineteenth century America, then conflict is virtually assured.

And finally, with regard to the public policy issues in home-school relations, this historical study raises a number of questions. For one thing, we may note the importance of shared values (also referred to as ideology). The public school system in America took shape in the context of a dominant "cosmopolitan native Protestant" or "Protestant republican" ideology. But American culture has changed radically over the past 150 years, primarily in

the declining influence of Protestant Christianity and the increasing significance of individualism (see Bellah et.al., 1985). Does public education still have a basis in our contemporary value system, or is it vulnerable to attack from those who would uphold other religious values and/or are committed to a more individualistic conception of society? The idea that everyone should attend schools managed by the government and paid for by taxes may be less than obvious to a society that increasingly values the notion of individual choice.

Another policy issue concerns the place in education of the development of moral character, especially as that involves religion. The debate over Potter's resolution supporting the introduction of the Bible into public schools would take a radically different form today. But the view that religion is central to character building, and that character building is an inherent part of education, though long since abandoned by "mainstream" Protestants, is now being championed by "fundamentalist" Protestants and Catholics. Moreover, there is a consistent and deep (although ambiguous) concern among parents generally, as reflected in a whole series of Gallop Polls over the years (see Elam, 1984), about the state of discipline in public schools. If parents were to become more actively involved in schools, discipline and moral education would likely be a significant focus of their concern.

At least with respect to the value of positive home-school relations, the common school reformers whose works are examined in this paper have their modern day counterparts in those (see Cochran and Henderson, 1985) who advocate greater professional recognition of the contribution of parents to education in the home and greater opportunities for parents to interact with educators and with each other through school involvement.

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